

the SCENE

Viewing the latest news through the lens of Scripture

This month, Joni Eareckson Tada celebrated her 69th birthday. Why is that such a big deal? Well, there was a time when Joni thought she might not want to see another birthday. As an athletic girl in Maryland, Joni’s life took a dramatic and almost fatal turn at the age of 17 when a diving accident resulted in her being paralyzed from the shoulders down.

Though she struggled with anger and depression, Joni overcame her challenges and learned to give everything she had to God. Through therapy she learned to paint by holding a brush between her teeth and began selling her creations. She released a book about her experiences in 1976—that book has now been translated into more than 45 languages and has over 4 million copies in print. The movie about her life and faith was shown around the world and resulted in 250,000 decisions for Christ. In 1979, Joni and Friends, her nonprofit organization, began the work of addressing the needs of families affected by disability. Not quite a decade later, Joni would find herself being appointed to the National Council on Disability, through which she spoke out for and worked toward the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Joni has accomplished more things in the fifty years she’s been paralyzed than most of us will ever even imagine doing. She has written over forty books, recorded several albums, starred in the movie about her life, and worked energetically as an advocate for those who have disabilities. She has spoken and reached literally millions of people with the message of the gospel. Even though God has never freed her from her wheelchair in a physical way, He has allowed her to run with His Word across the world and back again. And she lets everyone know about it.

As students arrive, give each of them a copy of the above to read. After all teens have had the opportunity to read the article, discuss it in this way:

What did you think of this story?

What kinds of challenges have you had to face in your life? How do you think you would respond if you had to face a challenge like Joni had?

What do you think about the way Joni has used her experiences to make a difference in the lives of others? How could you possibly use your experiences to help others?

The woman at the well would have been seen by everyone in her community as an unlikely evangelist, but she told her whole town about what Jesus said to her, and many people’s lives were changed. God can use anyone to spread His glory—He can use our challenges and what we lack; He can make our weaknesses into strengths for His kingdom. Let’s take a closer look at the unlikely evangelist who ministered in the name of Jesus.

To find out more about Joni’s organization and her story, go to www.joniandfriends.org.



MEETING GOD FACE-TO-FACE

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